



2017 BE INSPIRED Essay Contest | Age Group: Grades 10-12

2nd Place Winner: Elaine Gao

Age: 11th Grade

School: North Allegheny Senior High School (North Allegheny)

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt

The 1900s was a period of radical change that gave many women, like Maya Angelou, the opportunity to contribute their voices to the fight for rights. It was a period subject to much criticism, but the women who stood up against the common opinion of that time would lay the road to success for women and minorities in the future. Like Maya Angelou, the first lady during the Great Depression and World War II committed her life to fighting for civil rights. Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, a reserved, clumsy child, starved of recognition and love, grew with diplomacy and sensitivity into one of the most adored and esteemed women of her period.

Born in 1884, Eleanor grew up in a humble childhood. Her mother passed away in 1892, followed by her father's death two years later. Despite childhood hardships, Eleanor continued to work towards her goals. Shortly after her parents' passings, she was offered the opportunity to study at a prestigious school in England. She took this opportunity to foster a sense of self-confidence amongst other girls. As a child, Eleanor feared little, but she did fear the congruity and the solidarity of conformity. Maya Angelou and Eleanor Roosevelt both possessed the qualities of a humanitarian and an activist. The restraints of traditional roles and conventional standards pushed her into becoming an independent and influential activist, sentimental and unbiased to all races, religions, and sexes.

After returning from England, Eleanor married Franklin Delano Roosevelt. When FDR became engaged in politics, Eleanor took advantage of her position in politics by becoming an active participant in the Women's Division of the State Democratic Committee and working by her husband's side to keep his political aspirations alive. For the four terms her husband, FDR, served as president, Eleanor transformed the conventional role of the first lady. She did not entertain officials, passively advise the president, or pursue the traditional allegorical figure of the first lady. She delivered powerful speeches, served as a devoted diplomat and tireless activist, and educated herself on

current social conditions more than any other preceding first lady. Eleanor embodied the ambition and the determination of a feminist, fighting to break traditional female roles and challenging male dominance in the political and economical world. Through the Great Depression, Eleanor pushed for women's rights and advocated for FDR's New Deal reform policy. Similar to Maya Angelou, who was a poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist, Eleanor remained loyal to her opinion, writing newspaper columns like "My Day" and pushing for civil rights legislation for African Americans. She became an active participant in the League of Women Voters, focused on the country's poverty, and offered aid to the U.S. army during World War II. Although her liberal mentality was met with much criticism, she remained true to her ideology: "no matter how plain a woman may be, if truth and loyalty are stamped upon her face, all will be attracted to her." After the passing of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Eleanor moved on to serve in the United Nations, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Advisory Council for the Peace Corps. She felt the necessity to express her discontent on current conditions and contributed to the passing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Her dedication as a first lady, her courage as an activist, and her compassion as a humanitarian governed her accomplishments as a woman during a period of great change. In one of her autobiographies, Eleanor wrote, "A woman is like a tea bag - you can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water."

Throughout her womanhood, Eleanor inspired many younger women to fight their way through restraints. Her legacy continues to inspire young women like myself. Her courage and commitment has taught many to speak up against injustices to better society, even if it is met with opposition at first. Although Maya and Eleanor were involved in contrasting circumstances, they shared each other's ambitions and aspirations. Her actions have inspired me to promote equality and justice through community gatherings, school activities, or simply, writing an essay. Not all young women will be as outspoken as Eleanor Roosevelt or Maya Angelou, but all women, including myself, have the ability to contribute their talents and opinions, no matter how small, to educate, teach, and fight towards equality.